

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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GERALD.

BY ELEANOR C. PRICE.

CHAPTER XXXII. AT THE FIELDS.

DUST everywhere, and a hot, brooding, lurid atmosphere, which makes strangers to Kimberley, in spite of themselves, think of other and older "cities of the plain." The town lies irregularly about a low hill; it is surrounded by the great barren veldt, which stretches away for miles to the mountains, and is covered with rough scrub-grass, or sometimes it is all sand and dead brown stalks. The nearest green place, where trees and gardens are to be found, is Barkly, by the Vaal river, twenty-four miles away. Here, where the first diamonds were found, the Fields people go to get rid of their fevers, or at least to refresh themselves after enduring their own climate a little too long.

There may have been changes and improvements since that time; but when Gerald and Theo arrived at Kimberley the town was built of corrugated iron, with mud huts and canvas tents here and there; the streets, or roadways rather, were a wilderness of dust and holes; the place, in fact, was a mere settlement round the great mine, which was still worked by private claim-holders. Companies had hardly begun to be formed. Each man worked for himself, was lucky, sold his diamonds to the Jew dealers, lived wildly and extravagantly till the money was all gone; or was unlucky, worked on in despair till he could afford to work no longer, and ended perhaps in starvation or suicide, while, by no means rarely, the diamonds which would have saved his life and made his fortune were carried off from the mine by his Kafir labourers, hidden in their mouths, or even in a slit in their skins.

In those days the fortunate sorter carried

his diamonds home to his wife in his waist-coat-pocket, and she looked them carefully over, and put the white ones into a little bottle of acid on a shelf, for fear they should crack in cutting. Here at Kimberley people thought of diamonds, talked of diamonds, searched for diamonds from early in the morning till late at night. Thousands of Kafirs, possessing no clothes but an old scarlet jacket, which they generally did not wear, spent their days digging out soil in the mine, which was sent up in buckets to be pulverised, and washed, and sifted, and sorted; this last part of the work was always done by the owner himself.

All this interested Theo extremely when she first came to the Fields. She was in a mood to like everything, and everything amused her. She found things to admire, things that she said were beautiful, while Gerald laughed again at her idealising power. She saw new effects of colour, where he refused to see anything but dusty grey and brown—the purple-blue of the heaps of soil about the mine; the dark staging and machinery standing up against a faint yellow sky shading into blue; the red road running along into the town; the yellow-green of the grass; the yellow huts of a Kafir location, with black figures moving about in red coats, blue coats, red caps; sometimes a wild Kafir in an orange blanket, with beads round his neck. She liked to see the ox-waggons, gaily painted, outspanned in the great open square of the town, the long-horned oxen meekly waiting, the dark faces of many nations passing by, the coolies selling fruit, the Malays in their gaudy dresses driving or sauntering along. There was a romance about it all for Theo, in spite of the dust, the bad food, the enormous dearness of everything, the Jew dealers and the diamonds; but just now life itself was romance.

She had declared to Gerald that their own house was a great deal nicer than she expected.

"What did you expect, then?" he said rather dolefully.

"Oh, an iron thing," said Theo. "A shed, with two rooms. How many rooms has this? Four, and a kitchen, and a tent. No stairs! How nice! A garden actually, with trees in it. And it is all really our own!"

"I bought it and the furniture, as it stands," said Gerald. "If you had not come I should have sold it again; or, perhaps, have found some fellows to live with me."

He looked at her with laughing eyes, as she stood in the middle of the drawing-room. His wife—his house—it was all like a dream; and there was Combe in the background, casting anxious looks round her; she, too, though she would not have confessed it, was agreeably surprised at the house, which, at least, looked clean.

Poor little house! Theo often thinks of it now, and never without a strange ache at her heart, and a disposition to tears. If happiness was short-lived there, it was very real while it lasted.

Outside, the house was corrugated iron, with canvas stretched over the roof to keep the heat away. All along the front, a reed-fence divided it and its little compound from the road. There was a deep porch before the door, with a green creeper climbing over it; through this one went straight into what they called the drawing-room, which was the whole front of the house, except a little room on the left, called the study. This opened out of the drawing-room by a corner door, and so did the dining-room, a long little room behind; through it again was a bedroom, a sort of lean-to, with a sloping roof, looking out at the back on a row of blue gum-trees which divided them from their next-door neighbours. Then there was the kitchen, a tiny hole which opened out of the other end of the dining-room, and here was the only fireplace, except a stove in the corner of the dining-room. As there was no other room of any sort, Combe had to sleep in a tent outside in the compound; this frightened her a good deal at first, but she was not really a coward at heart, and was soon quite proud of her tent, which she made into a smart little abode.

She was thankful to have reached some sort of home at last, and not displeased to have full swing for all her talents, which

were many. She went out marketing, she cooked, she swept and dusted; she set herself to upholsterer's work, and made covers for the chairs and sofa out of some chintz that Mrs. Forester had advised her to bring from Cape Town. The canvas walls, the canvas ceilings, looked bare and ugly enough, but they had bought some photographs in Cape Town, and Gerald hung them up, with one or two little favourite pictures that Theo had brought with her. Then he and she had a few books, and these made the rooms look homelike, and, after all, it was home.

Gerald had a little office in another street, where his building company was supposed to give estimates, receive tenders, and do all its business, which on most days was no business at all. His chief occupation, therefore, was writing letters to the promoters of the concern in England, warning them how very poor its prospects were. If his pay was no more certain than the profits, this was, indeed, a bad look-out for him; but before throwing it over altogether, he wished to give some other man time to come out and take his place. His friend the banker, who had taken a fancy to him, would give him a temporary clerkship at any time. This was all very well, and might keep off starvation, but it did not prevent Gerald from feeling very uneasy.

He had no capital at all; Theo had her few thousand pounds; there had been no settlements—an additional cause of grief and rage to Captain North and Mr. Goodall. Thus they could do what they liked with their money as long as it lasted; and when Gerald looked about him at Kimberley, and saw how men doubled their fortunes there, all his thoughts began to turn one way. The prudent old banker strongly advised him against having anything to do with diamonds, holding up many instances of ruined men. Still Gerald was attracted. He had a certain turn for speculation, and though no venture of his had ever succeeded, yet there seemed to be no reason why he should be unlucky always.

He said nothing of this to Theo; at this time they found money talk perfectly uninteresting. It was only Combe who complained to her of the terrible price of everything, on which Theo laughed, and said that everything was so bad, it ought to go a great deal farther. They were not sure of much more than three hundred a year. Gerald had provided for Ada, and

had spent almost his last money in buying the house, and horses, and fetching his wife from Cape Town. Theo was not at all anxious, arguing that she would want no evening dresses, and failing to realise, at first, that their income was about equal to a hundred and fifty in England.

On one of the first days, she had waked up from a peaceful afternoon sleep, and was looking out of the window, expecting Gerald, when she saw Mrs. Lee coming up to the door. She hardly knew her; the little woman was so very much changed in appearance. All her misery had been left behind on board ship; she was very smartly dressed, very lively in her manners; she came laughing into the room, and insisted on kissing Theo, who bent her head with a shade of reluctance.

"Poor little thing!" she reproached herself; "why am I so horrid? It is very nice of her to want to kiss me."

And she immediately began with extreme kindness to ask after Mr. Lee and the baby.

"Oh, we're all flourishing, thank you," said Mrs. Lee. "As to you—dear me, how queer it is to call you Mrs. Fane!—you don't look as if you liked it much. You're a lot paler than you were on board. Ah, I've heard more than one say that it don't answer, coming out to them. It's more than they ought to expect. Is that it now? Or is it the journey that's been too much for you?"

Theo looked at her in a sort of dreamy surprise. There came vaguely into her mind at that moment a piece of advice that Mrs. Forester had given her, when they were talking about people and life at the Fields. This advice was: "Give yourself airs." It had amused Theo rather at the time, for she had sometimes found that her character at home was that of a young woman whose airs were insupportable; but it was true that since her engagement to Gerald she had changed very much in this respect. The old airs, no doubt, were somewhere not far off; but she felt gentle and charitable towards everybody, and not at all inclined to show them. She and Gerald had talked a little on the journey about these things, and had agreed that they would be very friendly with their neighbours, though not absolutely intimate with them. Theo had, of course, thought of Mrs. Lee, the only one she knew, and was quite prepared to be kind to the little woman, but then she had pictured her unhappy, and appealing to her kindness.

It must be confessed that this flush of prosperity, which made the poor little thing ten times more vulgar than she had been on board ship, had a chilling effect on her friend. Theo began to perceive that Mrs. Forester's advice was based on good sense, and not on prejudice or worldliness, as she had imagined at the moment. She ignored all Mrs. Lee's questions, and answered, smiling:

"I am very well, thank you. Of course, the climate tries one rather."

"I should think it did," said Mrs. Lee. "You've got to be careful about fever, everyone says, and this is just the time of year for it. So don't you go doing wild things—stopping out late, or going out too much in the sun. I expect you're one of those people who don't half take care of themselves."

"It would be very horrid to have the fever," said Theo.

She sat there, slender and pale, and dressed in grey, in the corner of her sofa, while Mrs. Lee, bolt upright and in very bright colours, went on chattering. Her black eyes went roving round the room; sometimes they were fixed on Theo, with a curious scrutiny of everything she had on. She talked about the fever for some time; then about the people she already knew at Kimberley—they were very jolly, she said; about the stores, and the shocking dearth of everything; about houses and furniture, inviting Theo in rather triumphant tones to come and see her house; then about dress, a subject on which she was quite at home; and now she began to gaze rather anxiously at Theo's grey gown.

"There's one thing we can do here at Kimberley," she said: "we can dress. I tell you, some of the ladies here are as smart as if they'd come out of a London fashion-book. I'm awfully glad, after all, that I brought some good dresses with me. You know, on board, I was ever so sorry. But I find people here are very particular. They take notice of you according as you're dressed. It doesn't do to be a scrub, just as if you were travelling among savages. You came out here to make your fortune, and you must look as if you were making it. You don't mind my saying so, do you, Mrs. Fane? Because, you see, I've been here longer than you have, and so, of course, I've learnt the ways."

"Yes," said Theo. She looked very quiet, very indifferent, lifting her eyes towards her visitor with a sort of idle sweetness.

Mrs. Lee was not at all conscious of the feelings she was exciting; but Gerald, who came up to the porch at that moment, and caught sight of Theo's profile, pale against the shadows, thought that it was a very long time since he had seen her look so cold and scornful.

"She has got a visitor she doesn't like," he thought. "Who is it, I wonder! What a bore!"

He was rather uncomfortable in his mind as he turned away, and went in at the study window. He did not like the people himself, but he got on pretty well with the men, and was nervously anxious that his wife should be popular among the women.

"She needn't show in her face that she despises them, poor wretches!" he thought. "They will never forgive her, and we shall suffer for it in the end. It is partly Mrs. Forester's fault."

"Then you are happier than you expected to be?" said Theo gently, dropping the subject of dress.

"Oh yes, I'm happy enough," said Mrs. Lee. "It's a beastly place, of course, but there's a lot going on. And I always did like, you know, to be in a place where there were more men than women; you get made such a jolly fuss with. And I've had several diamonds given me already; and George likes his partner, and they are having very good luck to begin with. Oh yes, I'm not sorry that we made up our minds to come."

There was only a thin partition between the drawing-room and the study; the door, too, did not shut particularly well; therefore Gerald had the advantage of hearing these last remarks. He thought he had better go in, and relieve Theo; it was evident that this lady would rather be entertained by him than by her; besides, the mention of George's luck interested him rather.

So he went quietly into the room, and Theo introduced him to Mrs. Lee, who jumped up, and shook hands enthusiastically. He certainly would not have known her again, though she well remembered her glimpse of him at Cape Town. He talked to her, and she was quite contented to chatter to him, while Theo listened, happier now that he had come in; since Mrs. Lee's arrival, she had for the first time felt a little despair about Kimberley.

They talked chiefly about diamonds, a subject which did not at this time interest her very much; she found herself dream-

ing as she sat there in her corner, and gazed out through the dark shadow of the porch into the dusty sunshine.

Mrs. Lee's black fringe had now become curly; it bobbed over her sparkling eyes as she talked with great animation to Gerald, telling him the whole history of her husband's speculation. A distant cousin, whom he had never seen, had been working out here alone for a year or two, and had written to George that he had better come out, and buy half his claim. George had never done any good in England, as his wife candidly stated. He wanted at first to leave her and the child behind, but she would not hear of that. On board ship she had certainly repented, but now she was glad she had come; George and his partner had found so many diamonds, worth so many hundred pounds; of course the expenses were great, but the profits were evidently going to be splendid. Mrs. Lee pulled out her purse, and shook out several rough diamonds on to the table.

"Rather valuable property to carry about like that," said Gerald, as he took them in his hand, his brown face looking grave and interested.

"Bless you, we think nothing of them here!" said Mrs. Lee.

She looked from one to the other for a minute in silence, while Gerald examined the little stones.

"You're not a judge of them yet, Mr. Fane," she said, "but you soon would be. I'm quite sharp about the different kinds already. Well, now, you won't be angry, either of you, if I say something?"

Gerald looked up for an instant and smiled; then his eyes went back to the diamonds.

"I don't think your wife will be offended," said Mrs. Lee; "I know her better than you. Well, now, society here is very curious about you two. They have often had young men of your sort, of course, who have run through their money at home—I beg your pardon, I didn't say you had—but Mrs. Fane is rather new, and they don't know what to make of her. And they can't understand why on earth you should have brought her out here, if it wasn't to make a fortune for her. As to that company, you know—I can tell you they shake their heads over that."

Gerald bent his head a little lower over the diamonds; he did not know what to say, and was conscious of the scorn in Theo's face, of a faint angry flush that

might have shown Mrs. Lee she did not quite understand her.

"It is very kind of 'society' to be curious about us," she said, with the faintest possible emphasis on "society"; "but we are not at all interesting; there is no mystery about us, and I hope it won't trouble itself any more. It is possible, I suppose, to live at Kimberley without wanting diamonds?"

Mrs. Lee was quite quick enough to feel her friend's indignation, and she coloured scarlet.

"Well, now, you must forgive me," she said. "Of course, none of us would be your equals in England, but it's a different thing out here, you know; we're all very much on a level."

"I did not mean that," said Theo, still coldly and haughtily. "I have no doubt the people here are very good people, but I don't see why our affairs should interest them."

"They are most thoroughly kind people," said Gerald.

"That they are, and so you'll find them if you are in any trouble. I could name two or three, Mrs. Fane, who will be as kind to you as you were to me on board ship."

Theo smiled a little at this. There was something frank and affectionate about the little woman, in spite of her vulgarity, which made it impossible to be very angry with her.

"I hope I shall not interest them by being in any trouble," she said.

When Mrs. Lee was gone, Gerald came back from the gate, and found his wife walking restlessly up and down the room.

"Do you suppose we shall have all this impertinence over and over again?" she said. "But you don't mind it, evidently. You rather like to be pitied, and wondered about, and interfered with."

"No, I don't," said Gerald, flinging himself on the sofa. "Look here, though. I told you what it would be, and we agreed we would be friendly with them all—don't you remember? And they are not ill-natured, Theo—just the other way. You had much better let them like you. Of course they will, if you'll let them. There is sense in what they say. Every day I see we ought never to have come here, if it wasn't for diamonds."

"I hate diamonds; I will not hear of diamonds," said Theo.

There was a cloud on his face as he sat and looked at her. She wandered about the room, and they were both silent for

several minutes—the first unhappy minutes that either of them had passed since they were married, just a month ago.

"Poor child!" Gerald said at last in a low voice. "It was awfully wrong; I ought never to have brought you here."

"Oh, Gerald, forgive me!" she said, and she turned round suddenly, and came towards him with tears in her eyes; so that their first attempt at a quarrel did not succeed.

FLOWERS IN THE FLOWERY LAND.

JOHN CHINAMAN is the cleverest gardener in the world. Everywhere outside his own country, from Montana to Singapore, he has the business in his own hands. In Queensland he gets big crops of delicious vegetables out of soil which, in its unimproved state, is either a hard-baked brick or the hungriest of granite-sand. In Colorado he combines washing the miners' shirts at a shilling apiece (and a good, careful washerman he is) with growing peas and early cabbages. At home he is as indefatigable as he is abroad. He has a great many mouths to feed; and, big as China looks on the map, there is only a limited and actually diminishing amount of land available for crop-growing. A large part of China is mountain—bare, unimprovable rock. You can terrace up to a certain height; and they do it wherever it can be done, and carry earth up on their backs, like the vine-dressers along the Rhine. But there comes a limit to that kind of thing; there are hills that will not be terraced, and vast wildernesses which even Chinese patience has not yet succeeded in making fertile. And, yet more, a great deal of his best land he cannot use for food-growing. As you walk round Shanghai you think that about half the land is waste. You fancy it is left, as large coverts and heather-clad heaths are left where game-preserving flourishes; but if you look closer you see turf-covered mounds. It is a burial-ground. Nowhere else in that neighbourhood will you see a square yard of land that is not under tillage. Half our little wars with the Chinese came from trespassing on these cemeteries. The French at Shanghai had what threatened to be a big row when they wanted to drive a road through one of them. They are "taboo." Sometimes of an evening you may see a village elder walking round and explaining to the youngsters that their ancestor of a hundred

years ago is buried there, and that five mounds off lies that happy father who was raised to the rank of marquis because his son came out first classic and senior wrangler in the final examination. I am speaking of an old burial-ground. In a new one you see the solid, highly-varnished coffins (often carved) lying on the surface. There they are left for a year or two, after which they are thatched or bricked over, according to the wealth of the family, the result being a mausoleum like those set up to several of our Royal Family. This soon gets grown over with grass and weeds, and ends by becoming a mound, still hallowed in the recollection of the elders, still visited on anniversaries with the appointed offerings. The thing to remember is that in China all is above ground; there is no digging of graves; simply laying down of coffins and covering in by-and-by.

In old times they used to bury beside their dead gold and precious stones of all kinds. They are more economical nowadays; one remembers how they burn horses, and birds, and furniture, etc., cut out of gold or red paper, instead of the old offerings, which have grown too costly. In their present state of mind, the Chinese are not likely to take to cremation or to let their grave-fields be desecrated by plough or spade; therefore they are bound to go in for sewage, and if our people out there want to make life pleasanter, let them try to get an imperial edict for deodorising. Our residents cannot complain much about the unhealthiness of the present system. The Chinese are, on the whole, a healthy people. A wicked friend at my elbow, who has been a good deal among them, and from whom I have got a good many hints, says it is the opium that keeps them well. Nothing else, he is sure, would save from fever a man who is paddling all day in a paddy-field, up to his knees in liquid manure. If we leave off sending them opium, they will have to manure still more heavily, for the poppy takes a deal of ground and is a very exhausting crop.

But though food-growing is a necessity at home, John Chinaman always manages to indulge, though it be but on a very small scale, in the luxury of "landscape-gardening." His foreign gardening is done to pay, and it does pay; but for the Flowery Land, to which every Chinese emigrant hopes, at any rate, to be transmitted in his coffin, even if he never sees it again in the flesh, are mostly reserved

the dwarf trees, the miniature bridges, the little ornamental waters, as we see them on the old willow-pattern plates. Ground is so precious, so much being uncomplainingly given up to the dead, that the Chinese gardener has to do a great deal in a small space; and he is wonderfully clever with flowers and vegetables alike, for he has the hereditary experience of centuries. With us landscape gardening is a thing of yesterday, while kitchen gardening only dates, so to speak, from the day before yesterday. The monks did a great deal, but the Reformation discredited gardening, as savouring of fast-days and such like superstition, and Elizabeth used to send to Flanders for a salad. Even Dutch William got those early peas, of which he would not give Mary a taste, from his own country. But in China all sorts of field and garden work literally dates from time immemorial, it has the same halo of religion about it that it had among the Incas of Peru.

Near the City of Luanfou, in Western Honan, is the Mount Po-kou-chan ("of the hundred fruits"). There the Emperor Chen Nung (divine husbandman) is still worshipped in a temple which dates from our sixth century, and is built on the site of one ages older. Centuries before Abraham's sacrifice, Chen Nung, ruler of the little land which afterwards grew into the huge Chinese Empire, was sowing corn, studying the properties of plants, and actually making the first Pents'ao (herbal), of which every century or so has seen a fresh one. Emperors have written these herbals; but the latest, dated 1848, is by a high official, who was successively minister of religion, war, and finance, and, retiring through ill-health, gave up his leisure to this botanical work, which he left in manuscript, and which the Emperor published after his death, giving the writer the title of Yu Lou Nung—the nung, or husbandman of Yu Lou, the district in Honan where he was born. The book has eight hundred plates, and its value is recognised in the Chinese Repository (vol. vi., 1869), and also by Dr. Bretschneider, whose Early European Researches Into the Flora of China was published three years ago in Shanghai. The curious thing is that this most modern of Chinese botany books contains portions of the old, old books, even of that of Chen Nung himself. Missionaries have helped us a great deal in learning the truth about the Chinese. They have not always been wise; the

Jesuits of old meddled in politics, the modern French missionary is unscrupulously proselytising. But, all allowance made, they have done good both to the Chinese, by doctoring them, and, above all, by showing them that there are white men with souls above dollars, and to the Europeans, by opening up the language and the literature. Dr. Bretschneider is not a missionary; he has for fifteen years been physician to the Russian Embassy at Peking. But the mission libraries have been of great help to him, as they have to the compilers of that *Botanicon Sinicum*, which Trübner published two years ago; and books like these enable those who have not been in China to realise what a wonderful land it is for flowers and vegetables.

In the old time China must have been rather bare of useful plants. Such everyday vegetables as beans, cucumbers, lucerne, sesame, coriander, were all brought in in the days of the Emperor Wu Ti, who first opened communication with Japan, and by conquering part of Annam, established those rights which have lately come into collision with French aggressiveness. His ambassador, Chang Kien, brought back (B.C. 126) from the Oxus the above-named plants, and also the walnut; and, since then, acclimatising has gone on at a great rate. The date, the banana, the orange, mustard, pea, spinach, and half-a-dozen other plants and trees were brought in at different dates. Maize they seem to have got from America long before Europeans had crossed the Atlantic; though some botanists think the plant is one of the very few which belong alike to the old world and to the new.

Some of the Chinese plant-names are very quaint. Oats are called "little bell corn"; the bean is "worm-plant"; the tiger-lily is "a hundred in one," because of the crowd of little scaly bulbs which form at the roots of the flower-stalks—nay, in some varieties, aboveground, at the bases of the stem-leaves; the betel-nut is "Mr. Guest" (*pin-lang*), because the first act of civility to a visitor is to use those words in offering it to him. Tea, in common parlance, is "tcha," i.e. gold—"worth its weight in gold;" in the literary language it is "ming," i.e. opening out, because the rolled leaves do this in hot water. The willow, from its vigorous growth, is the emblem of immortality, and its sign is the sun against a folding-door, a branch of this tree being always set up against a door when a sacrifice is to be offered. Talking of signs, this

wonderful Chinese language, which is a whole circle of the sciences in itself, enables the literary Chinaman to express by the letter that he uses, both the natural order and the species to which any plant belongs. People are beginning to change their views about this language of signs. We used to sneer at it as childish, and say that a man was the best part of his life learning how to write. Very true; but, then, when he does know how to write, he knows, by the very fact of being an accomplished scribe, all that Chinese learning has to teach about all the 'ologies.

Horticulture naturally goes hand-in-hand with botany. Abroad the Chinaman is, in the main, a market-gardener. At home he goes in for rare flowers with the recklessness of a Dutchman. A little shrub of that sambac, which smells like orange and rose in one, has sold at Peking for from two pounds to three pounds. A bright-blooming flower, the *Pergularia odoratissima*, has brought from twenty to thirty ounces of silver. Most people know that we owe the Chinese some of our showiest flowers—the aster, the chrysanthemum, the China-pink, the camelia, the begonia, Lord Macartney's hortensia (a kind of hydrangea), etc., but few are aware that the Guernsey-lily, that rare beauty, which exaggerates the crocus and snowdrop habit of putting forth its flowers before its leaves, hails from the Flowery Land. An English ship, with a number of the bulbs on board, was wrecked off the Channel Islands; the bulbs were washed into one of those sandy bays which nestle between the granite cliffs; and the mild Gulf-stream climate did the rest. Why have the Chinese gone in for dwarfing their trees? They manage it wonderfully. Missionaries tell us they have seen cypresses and pine-trees forty years old, and not taller than two feet high. It makes one think of the famous Wistman's wood on Dartmoor, where are "a hundred oaks a hundred feet high;" but, while the weird "forest," where the Wild Hunter of Devon stables his hounds and his black steed during the daytime, are twisted and gnarled into all sorts of elfin shapes, such as Doré revelled in till his trees became instinct with uncanny life, the Chinese dwarfs are miniature trees, not misshapen abortions.

A Chinaman goes in for dwarf trees because they enable him to have, in a strip of ground no bigger than a suburban back-yard, samples of all the vegetable growths from Annam to the Peiho river. Their

big trees are mostly grown round the pagodas. Like Antigone in the play, who knew she had got to consecrated ground because of the thick growth of forest, in which the nightingales sang all day long, so, in China, when you see groups of the chestnut-leaved oak, the ginkgo, the huge *Pinus bungeana*, whose trunk in its old age gets as white as if it was lime-washed, the *thûja* (our little arbor vitae, there a big tree), whose wood, scented and decay-proof, is used for coffins, and is powdered to make incense, you may know there is a pagoda not far off; and pretty soon you will be guided to it by avenues of bamboos, whose joints are hollowed out to form niches for images. The bamboo is the sacred tree, as useful as the pig, of which they say no part is waste from tip of nose to tip of tail. It is seen everywhere; for, though it likes best the warm swamps of the south, it can, by reason of its very rapid growth, get on very well in the shorter summers of North China. Fortune, whom we sent out thirty years ago to report on the vegetable wealth of China, says that by actual measurement he proved that a bamboo will grow from half to very nearly a whole yard in the twenty-four hours. Anyhow, the kind planted round pagodas reaches in a few months the height of over twenty feet, throwing out no branches for the first seven feet. It is used for everything; the young shoots are as good as asparagus, the pulp makes string and paper, the stems are ready-made water-pipes, as well as forming the strongest of masts and yards. Chinese botany books tell of huge bamboos used to make "dug-outs;" but these are things of the past. It is the emblem of self-sacrifice, for—aloe-like—it dies after flowering; and, say the Chinese, all the cuttings die along with the parent stock, no matter how far off they may have been planted, or how early in the tree's life they may have been taken. To form some idea of the richness of a Chinese shrubbery one need only mention the *ailanthus*, *paulownia*, *catalpa*, four or five kinds of *magnolias*, the *gleditschia* or vegetable soap, the tree peony, the *forsythia*, *weigelia*, *deutzias*, *hydrangeas*, *spireas*, etc. Were they not right in calling theirs the Flowery Land? And must not a man want close packing as well as dwarfing to get half these into an ordinary town garden?

The Chinese, too, are adepts not only at miniature rockeries, lakelets, rivulets, all within the limits of a lawn-tennis ground,

but where they have scope, at what we call landscape-gardening. In England began the protest against that formality which had lasted on from classical times. But what set the English mind on a new groove? Our Queen Anne gardens were just as formal as those of France under the Great Monarch. Bacon had pleaded for a wilderness and little artificial brushwood-covered hills, but no one had listened to him, and Evelyn's ideas ran in straight lines and stiff hedges as undeviatingly as did those of *Mæcenas's* gardeners. It was going to China and seeing how gracefully nature might be imitated which taught a more excellent way to men like James Cunningham, who, about 1702, brought to Europe the first systematic notes of Chinese botany; and by such men the fashion was set which resulted in that grand change from art to nature, which is credited to the English.

I sometimes wonder that one of those Dukes with whom it is the correct thing to have a Scotchman as head-gardener—thereby setting over themselves a tyrant who thinks himself far superior to the wearer of the strawberry-leaved crown—does not supplement Mr. McThornie with a Chinaman. It would be interesting to learn how these horticultural magicians manage to graft an oak on a chestnut, a vine on a jujube, a quince on an orange, etc. Virgil, when he talks, in his Second Georgic, of grafting the nut-tree on the arbutus, the pear on the plane-tree, the apple on the mountain-ash, and describes swine crunching their acorns under elms, was only describing what one may see any day in China. The grand reason why the Chinese get on so well with gardening is because they work at it as if they loved it. Genius is "an infinite capacity for taking pains," and this is what they do to an incredible extent. A Chinaman gives up his life to his business. He does not talk about duty, but he does it, contented—as no European can be, for our temperaments are different—in the station to which he is called. No doubt, too, Imperial patronage gives a great impulse to all field-work. Every year the Son of Heaven, imitating the deified Chen Nung, goes forth, at the vernal equinox, clad in imperial yellow, and preceded by the Mayor of Peking and a whole troop of mandarins and great men, to sow the five kinds of corn. Five is the Chinese sacred number. On a half-decimal system they divide their foot into five inches; they have five ele-

ments—fire, water, wood, metal, earth—five beatitudes, five senses, etc. Chen Nung sowed rice, wheat, the two millets (bird and bearded), and soja (a kind of vetch). Mr. Bretschneider was told by the mandarin-president of the Temple of Agriculture that nowadays the sowing is made with rice, wheat, bearded millet, sorghum, and soja. Nor were the Emperors careful only of cereals. "I would rather," says Kang Hi "get my people a new kind of fruit than build a hundred porcelain towers." Kang Hi, who reigned from 1661 to 1722, was, no doubt, a man of real genius, merciful in victory—a rare wonder in a Chinese—kind to Christians, to whom he gave permission to preach, and who repaid his kindness by saving him from a dangerous conspiracy. But other Emperors have said much the same, some of them carrying utilitarianism to excess, like Hong-wou, the founder of the Ming dynasty, who, when he came back in triumph after having at last driven out the Mongols, was by the governor of some province presented with some moutans (tree-peonies) with marvellously lovely flowers. "Very pretty," said the emperor, as if he had never seen a moutan before; "I wonder what kind of fruit it bears. Be good enough to send me some in the season." The governor, like Girdler, the cooper, in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, "stood reproved," and in due time sent his majesty a basket of magnificent peaches, as if they had been the moutan fruit.

A Chinese kitchen-garden contains almost all our vegetables, and many more besides. If they do not care to grow potatoes, except where there are Europeans to eat them, they grow the batata, which is sold boiled at every street-corner. Of the water-lily, sacred to Buddha, they eat the sugary seeds, and also a sort of sago made from its root. "Water-chestnuts," too (eaten by the old lake dwellers in Switzerland), are largely grown. Every canal is full of floating islands of them; and the gathering must look like that picture in this year's *Grosvenor of Athelney in Flood*, where young and old are going about after the apples in boats. Instead of boats put tubs, each pushed with a bamboo-pole by a yellow man or woman, and paint two or three upsets, for John Chinaman is full of fun, and those who have seen a water-chestnut harvesting say that everybody is on the broad grin, and accepts a ducking with the same good-humour with which he gives one. They cultivate fungi, too, burying

the rotten stump of a tree which bears harmless ones, and so ensuring a crop. One kind, the lin-chi, is one of the emblems of immortality. It gets as dry as those honey-combed fungi which they eat in mid-France, and "keeps good" for years. The bonzes use it as the foundation of their ambrosia, and picture their gods with lin-chi in their hands. The "five fruits" are peach (sign of love, because its blossoms in winter), apricot, plum, chestnut, and jujube. The wild apricot is valuable for the oil extracted from its kernels. This first came into use, say the Chinese botany books, in our fourteenth century. A good and wise physician lived in a district so poor that he scarcely ever got a fee; so, having found out the use of apricot-oil, he said: "If you can't pay you must do this. Let every patient plant a wild apricot on that bare hill to the east." Fifteen years went by; the hill was pretty well covered. "Now," said the good man, "I am growing old, and after me you will perhaps not be able to get your doctoring gratis. Let the village undertake to keep up this apricot-orchard that has cost you nothing. The oil will not only pay a doctor, and buy as much medicine as you can want, but it will also do a good deal towards supporting your old men and your orphans."

There is no need to speak of tea, of which the supply is so exceeded by the demand that the Chinese mix it with all sorts of foreign leaves. A French missionary, Armand David, corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences, and clever botanist, has found, in the mountains of Moupin, towards the Thibet frontier, a hairy-leaved tea which he thinks may be grown in the dry air of the Dauphiny hills; but this will not help us much now that the French, who used to make honest goods, have been driven to adulteration by the failure of their phylloxera-killed vines. People who sophisticate their wine will not stick at medicating their tea.

Wax-trees and tallow-trees are invaluable to the Buddhists, who, of course, must burn no animal fat on their altars. There are half-a-dozen trees and plants which make better paper than the bamboo—what we call rice-paper, for instance, comes from the paper-mulberry. A Chinese nettle and a giant hibiscus make excellent rope; and the ramia has its leaves covered with threads just in the right state for spinning. When Virgil said, "The Seres comb from leaves a slender fleece," one used to fancy he was speaking of silk, confounding in

fact the worm with the food it eats; but the latest idea is that some notion of the ramia and its produce had travelled as far as the Greek naturalists on whom Virgil relied. If any of your friends are homœopaths you will have heard plenty about rhus; one of the many kinds, the rhus vernix, makes along with the elæo-cocca (added because its juice is fatal to insects) the famous lacquer. Great at dyeing, the Chinese have managed to find out vegetable mordants; hair-dyeing they manage in a peculiar way. They drink their dye. A six months' course of some vegetable decoction is said to be infallible; and was regularly used, we are told, by the Christians to darken the hair of their European priests, that so they might escape detection. Nearly all their dyes are vegetable; the imperial yellow being got from the root of the curcuma; saffron and gardenia flowers, and mignonette, and all the other yellow dyes, being held unworthy of this great object.

And, now, to prove what was said about their skill in landscape-gardening, let us say a word about the Pekin Summer Palace Park. Mr. Swinhoe and Sir Hope Grant both paint it in glowing colours—such a pleasure-garden as Kublai Khan planned round his “wondrous dome, by Alp, the sacred river.” “Twelve miles of pebbled paths leading through groves of magnificent round lakes, into picturesque summer-houses; as you wandered along, herds of deer would amble away from before you, tossing their antlered heads. Here a solitary building would rise fairy-like from a lake, reflected in the blue water on which it seemed to float. There a sloping path would carry you into the heart of a mysterious cavern leading out on to a grotto in the bosom of another lake. The variety of the picturesque was endless, and charming in the extreme. The resources of the designer appear to have been unending.” And what the Emperor had in its full glory round his summer palace, every Chinaman who has made a little money tries to have on a small scale round his house. It is the gardens which, in the absence of many of our modes of sanitation, keep the dense populations of Chinese cities tolerably healthy, for trees are great absorbers of bad and diffusers of good gases. We have a great deal still to learn from them in the way of gardening, and it is no use crying down our climate—the climate of North China is a very harsh, ungenial one, far worse for both men and plants than ours.

It is not the climate that is in fault, but the gardeners; ours do not put the heart and the patience into their work that John Chinaman does into his.

OUR SHINING RIVER.

VIII.

IT was evident that Mrs. Pycroft's alarm was not without cause. If her husband had been dealing with the trust-property in a way unknown to his co-trustee, Mr. Boothby, then the meeting of the latter with the purchaser of the property would be like to open the eyes of both. But then, as Mr. Boothby would himself be liable to make good the deficiency, he was hardly likely to blazon the discovery to the world. On the contrary, he would be only anxious to hush the matter up, and obtain some security from Pycroft to save himself from loss. And I could suggest an admirable plan.

“Give me Claudia, and I would myself become the surety.”

“But you do not see it all,” cried Mrs. Pycroft.

And, to say the truth, I did not. It was one of those complicated lawyer's networks of trusts and settlements, devised by men long dead and gone, in which the present generation were rolling about helpless. Claudia's brother dead, and Claudia herself became the one entitled to the money—that is, when she came of age, as if she died before that event, everything went to Charlwood. So that as far as the next few years went, none of the parties concerned could give Mr. Pycroft a valid release. But Mrs. Pycroft had been told by a lawyer she consulted, that if Charlwood married his cousin Claudia, then the whole of the eggs being, as it were, in one basket, the trust might be considered as discharged, and Charlwood could exonerate his uncle from all the consequences of his rashness.

For this end had Mrs. Pycroft been working ever since her son's death, and now she saw all her projects overturned by Charlwood's unfortunate attachment, as she deemed it. It did not seem to her a cruel thing that Claudia's happiness should be sacrificed, when such momentous issues were at stake as the family honour and the family position in the world. Her husband, however, Mrs. Pycroft observed bitterly, was too indifferent in the matter. If he had acted with firmness, the affair would have been

settled before this; but he did not seem to realise the danger of his position. Perhaps it was better that he should not realise it.

At this moment we heard Mr. Pyecroft's voice calling upon his wife to take her seat in the carriage.

"We have been much interested in this little hostelry," he observed when we rejoined him, "and especially in the sign it bears, in which, I fancy, is wrapped up a morsel of local history—The Beetle and Wedge. Now what would you make of that?"

"I should say," replied Claudia flippantly, "that the wedge was used for crushing the beetle."

"The beetle referred to," rejoined Mr. Pyecroft mildly, "is not one of the coleoptera. It is a huge wooden mallet, and, with the wedge, is chiefly used, I believe, for splitting wood. Where wood is much used for firing, the beetle and wedge are still in constant use, and I should gather from this sign that at some perhaps distant date, a hardy race of lumberers, as the Americans call them, settled upon this river, and supplied the rising settlements on its banks, and London as their chief, with firewood. The forest which once existed here attracted, no doubt, many of these lumberers—

"How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke

—and the alehouse which arose to supply their wants boasted this emblematical representation of their calling. They are gone, and we should seek in vain for any other record of their existence."

Mrs. Pyecroft raised hands and eyes, as much as to say, "Here is the poor man worrying himself about fabulous woodcutters when his own existence is endangered!" And then they drove off, and we embarked once more from the crazy old ferry-boat, where a tottering old fellow, the very model of an old woodcutter, with a tall hat and a smock frock, and gentlemanly manners—the super-gentlemanly manners of an old-fashioned peasant—loosed the painter, and sent us on our voyage with a grateful benediction. And so we floated lazily down, conscious that the day's work is over, and looking out for restful spots, where the white water-lilies lie in bright constellations—or where some fisherman has moored his punt in the shade, and where there is all the excitement of watching the float without the responsibility of fishing. But the fish thus

watched for never bites, and the rosy old gentleman who is fishing looks at us as though he thought there was an evil eye among us that scared away the fish. And thus we drop gently down to Goring Lock.

Of the places which appeal at once to the sympathies of the passer-by, and which say, in unmistakable language, stay a while, none are more explicit in this way than the twin villages of Streatley and Goring. On one side rises the steep, bluff down, with its smooth, turfy covering, and its crown of ancient forest; on the other a chain of lesser hills, all partly woodland, the edge of those erst wild Chiltern Hundreds, where once the hart and the boar roamed at will, and the outlaw lay in wait for passers-by. In the gorge between, the river spreads itself out, and descends in many mimic falls, with a pleasant, sympathetic splash and murmur, with islets among swift streams, and sparkling shallows, over which stretches the plain old wooden bridge, the hyphen that unites the twin villages, with their red roofs and grey church-towers. The lock, too, is a feature, with the neat cottage of the lock-keeper, and the mill-stream, where a cluster of boats are lying moored to the bank, and the white tents of some campers-out, who have lit their fires and put their pots on to boil, while the smoke curls gracefully among the trees.

The lock-keeper, too, greets us pleasantly, as if we had been long expected and provided for, and seems to consider it a personal compliment to himself, that we have determined to stay here for a while. He can promise us every enjoyment the riverside can afford: plenty of fish for those who can catch them, charming drives, romantic walks; even the weather shall be favourable, and he brings out his favourite barometer to justify the prophecy. But our friendly lock-keeper advises us to lose no time in securing quarters, for it is Saturday, and the next train will bring down the London division, when probably every cockloft in the village will be at a premium.

This last announcement is rather startling, for we had not realised before that London was so near at hand. So far we had seemed to be among the Midlands; people we met came from all points of the compass, it was a chance whether from Bristol or Lincoln, Bath or Birmingham; the Londoner was rather an exception. But now we had crossed the vague circle of the Metropolitan radius, we might measure our

miles henceforth from Whitehall Stairs or London Bridge.

It was only, indeed, by the luck of finding rooms that somebody from London had engaged beforehand, and had just telegraphed to say he did not want, that we managed to secure a local habitation in Goring. But once established in our domicile, and it was pleasant to look forward to the arrival of the London train. Claudia, especially, was agreeably excited. The prospect of such a stir and movement, after the quiet seclusion of country life, had a distinct charm for her, and the distant roar of the approaching train seemed to herald something altogether novel and delightful.

The train stopped and passed on again, and then came the rush; first the whirl of the local flies, three at least, crammed with luggage and passengers, skirmishers with light handbags, family men urging along recalcitrant wives and offspring, other shrewd fellows, who had secured the railway-porters and their local knowledge, with the grim determination not to be shaken off till provided for. The superior speed of the local fly was compensated for by a certain want of flexibility. Thus, having first missed their aim, the party in a fly are outflanked and cut off by the skirmishing detachment. Thus a lady, gorgeously equipped, and having a husband in attendance, and two curiously shaved black poodles, who has been loudly demanding dressing-rooms and bath-rooms, is reduced to accept, with thankfulness, a single room over a butcher's shop.

But when this momentary bustle was over, the village assumed once more its tranquil, peaceful aspect. Except for a general flavour of mutton-chops in the quiet street, and a feeling of fried ham in the air, there is nothing to show for the inroad of visitors. Our landlord, happily, has just returned from Reading with an ample store of provisions, for it seems that the resources of the neighbourhood are limited, and thus we are relieved from any apprehensions of a scarcity before Monday morning.

Our dinner-party, however, is not a very gay one. Mrs. Pyecroft has not got over the alarm excited by the supposed machinations of Mr. Thomas, although I have done my best to show her that her fears are chimerical. Claudia, too, is moved by vague agitation, the former frank friendliness of her manner being replaced by a certain shy reticence, and mademoiselle regards us both with awakened mistrust,

as if fearing that her pupil has learnt the forbidden verb in spite of all her precautions. Only Mr. Pyecroft retains his bland and courteous composure, and it seems that his wife has carefully concealed from him her doubts and fears.

And then Mrs. Pyecroft suggests, with rather forced playfulness, that she and I should take a quiet sail together down the river. We had a few private matters to talk over, and the rest must amuse themselves in their own way.

"I had hoped for a rubber," suggested Mr. Pyecroft mildly.

"We shall be back in time for that, perhaps," replied his wife, "and perhaps we may pick up a player on our voyage."

Of course, I saw what Mrs. Pyecroft had in hand—a cutting-out expedition, such as we read of in the exploits of the British Navy. There was grim determination in the whole pose of her figure, and she was provided, no doubt, with sets of moral manacles, in case the prisoner to be captured should prove refractory. I admired the woman's courage and determination, although I could not breathe any fervent prayers for the success of the enterprise.

It was a lovely evening, and the valley was filled with golden light, while the river, shining bright between its darkened banks, gave us the feeling as if we were about to put off among the clouds, with a rift of bright sky below us. Boats were shooting to and fro, and the plash of oars, and their gentle thud against the rowlocks, echoed pleasantly in the evening air. There was only wanting the voice of song on the water to make the surroundings perfect.

"A great deal too perfect," I said firmly to Mrs. Pyecroft, "to be devoted to unpleasant business; and, anyhow, it was a shame to leave Claudia behind."

"Very well," said Mrs. Pyecroft after a moment's thought; "Claudia can come. Mademoiselle, you must go back and play piquet with my husband."

Claudia, who had looked doleful enough at being left behind, now sprang joyously into the boat, and we pushed off into the bright, shining river. And Claudia was the first to break the silence.

"We are going to pay a visit, mother?" she said interrogatively.

Mrs. Pyecroft nodded assent.

"And we shall see Rebecca," continued Claudia in a meditative manner; "and I am glad of that, for I want to see if she is so charming as some people think her."

"She is very well in her way," rejoined

Mrs. Pyecroft with assumed indifference. "But, Claudia, a great deal depends upon this visit, and I have brought you, thinking that you have some influence with your cousin Charlwood, and that among us we shall persuade him to leave these objectionable people."

Claudia's lip curled at this, but she made no direct reply, and presently a turn in the river brought us in sight of a wooded bank, beneath which were moored two or three house-boats, all lighted up, with rows of Chinese lanterns festooned along the sides, making the quiet river-bank look like some gaily-lighted street. The whole scene suggested rather China or Japan than our sober English clime—the bright, clear air, the sense of indefinite distance, the gleam of the coloured lights all reflected in the water, and presently the voice of a singer, though all China or Japan could not produce such a fresh, rich voice as that we heard thrilling over the water.

The song was trite and commonplace enough—one of the most recent ditties of the music-halls—but the expression was everything, and Rebecca—for she, doubtless, was the singer—put a soul into that song which turned the twopenny-halfpenny thing into gold.

"What a charming voice!" murmured Claudia. "It is like what one reads of the sirens."

"Who turned their lovers into pigs, surely," put in Mrs. Pyecroft savagely.

As we approached the little floating river settlement, the air was charged with the faint incense of tobacco, with a slightly vinous flavour, suggestive of an hotel bar, but not otherwise unpleasant. The windows of The Crab were wide open, and we could see the table spread with the remains of a luxurious dessert, while the guests, among whom we could make out Charlwood and Mr. Boothby, were seated around in various easy attitudes. Mrs. Thomas, with one arm hanging over the side of the boat, was fanning herself vigorously with the other, while at one end of the room, Rebecca, seated at the piano, looked over her shoulder, engaged in animated conversation. As we touched the barge, causing a gentle thrill to pass through it, Mrs. Thomas gave a cry of alarm:

"La! there's a boat coming aboard us!"

"We are not intruding, I hope?" said Mrs. Pyecroft in her clearest, most dulcet tones, as we made good our landing on the enemy's gangway. "We heard you were

in the neighbourhood, and have come to pay a friendly call."

"Delighted, I'm sure, ma'am," cried Mr. Thomas, laying aside his long clay and springing to his feet. "Wife, wake up! Here's Mrs. Pyecroft come to pay you a visit."

"I'm sure you do me proud, ma'am," said Mrs. Thomas, curtsying, having forgotten her company manners in the confusion, and reverting to the accustomed ways of former years.

Rebecca looked on from her seat by the piano with curling lip, and interrupted the further flow of civilities by dashing forth some sounding chords on the piano, as she sang in bravura style:

"Oh, come ye in peace here, or come ye in war,
Or to dance at our bridal, young Lord Lochinvar?"

"Your daughter?" asked Mrs. Pyecroft sweetly, turning to Rebecca. "Your charming voice, my dear, has enchanted us on the river. My daughter compared you to a siren."

"What!" cried Mr. Thomas, flushing indignantly. "To one o' them foghorns! My daughter's voice, acknowledged by connoisseurs to be first-class, compared to a nasty booming foghorn! You gentle-folks are trying to take a rise out of me."

Charlwood roared with laughter, and Mr. Boothby foggily joined in the chorus, raising Mr. Thomas's rising ire to boiling-over point.

It was an unfortunate incident, and shows how much depends on unavoidable chances, and how

The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley.

For how could Mrs. Pyecroft have foreseen that her classical allusion to the sea-nymphs who sang Ulysses out of his senses should be taken by Mr. Thomas nautically instead of classically? Indeed, I don't suppose that Mrs. Pyecroft had ever heard of the steam siren, the latest and loudest development of the foghorn. At the same time, it was vain to try to enlighten Mr. Thomas, or to soothe his dignity, wounded in its tenderest part. The affair was like one of those sudden broils that flared out among Scots borderers, when it only remained for the most peaceful of men to whip out his whinger and choose sides.

For Mrs. Thomas, weak at times, was always prompt on her husband's side in anything like a row, and poor Mrs. Pyecroft's tact and suavity were useless to her in this war of words. Like a skilful swimmer

in a whirlpool, she could only throw up her arms and resign herself to fate.

"Come, Claudia," cried Mrs. Pyecroft at last, after vainly striving to be heard, wrapping her mantle round her with dignity, "this is no place for us." And we took to our boat, feeling for the moment as if we had received a crushing defeat, and quite demoralised.

But we had not pulled very far up stream towards Goring when we heard the splash of oars behind us, and presently we were hailed from the river by Charlwood's voice, still indistinct with laughter, and perhaps, to a certain extent, with wine.

"Had an awful row with the old chap after you left," explained Charlwood when his boat came alongside. "He was so wild with Boothby and me for laughing at him that he ordered us both out of the ship. And here we are!"

"Insufferable scoundrel!" broke out Boothby in his deep tones. "Mrs. Pyecroft, I'm humiliated, degraded, that you should have had to listen to such language in my presence. I'll never speak to the villain again!"

"Oh, he'll be all right in the morning," said Charlwood lightly. "All right, and grovelling to be forgiven."

"As far as I am concerned, Mr. Boothby," said Mrs. Pyecroft graciously, "I can't regret a circumstance that has given us your society. For you will spend the evening with us, and play a rubber."

"Delighted, my dear madam," cried Boothby. His daughters, he told us, had gone back to Oxford to stay with their friend in the long cloak, and he was looking forward to a few days' quiet enjoyment away from his womankind.

"And you have fallen out of the frying-pan into the fire," cried Mrs. Pyecroft. "For that ungallant speech you shall be condemned to an entirely masculine rubber. There's yourself, my husband, Mr. Penrice, and Charlwood."

"Don't count me in," said Charlwood huskily; "I've half promised to meet some fellows at The Swan for a quiet turn at Nap. But I'll come in later, perhaps."

With this half-promise Mrs. Pyecroft was obliged to be content. After all, it was a great success to have carried off Mr. Boothby—to have been routed, and yet to have secured the honours of war.

Mrs. Pyecroft had a long talk with Mr. Boothby, with a result quite satisfactory to her. He had promised that he would not do anything to bring Mr. Pyecroft into

trouble, although, of course, he wanted to make himself secure. At the same time, it was evident that Mr. Thomas had gained from Boothby all the information he wanted; and if Charlwood were to join in the plot, being, as Boothby said, in legal terms, the remainder-man, and so with an equitable interest in the property, no doubt between them they could set the Court of Chancery to work with crushing effect. But then Charlwood was very unlikely to join in the plot, except under strong pressure, for one of his good points is a warm attachment to his family. Altogether, Mrs. Pyecroft is relieved of a good deal of her anxiety, and sets out her whist-table with a light heart. Mademoiselle is to play in the first rubber, and falls to myself as partner, while Pyecroft and Boothby play against us.

Mademoiselle has a good deal to say as the game progresses. First of all a running commentary on the cards as they are played. Aha! le pique or le carreau! as the case may be, as if there were an element of surprise or of a dramatic situation in each round. The court-cards, as they appear, she salutes with each its familiar name. Lancelot, for the knave of clubs, Hector, and so on. The kings she saluted with something like awe—mademoiselle is of a family that has always been royalist—and with high-sounding names that recall the heroes of Racine and Corneille. Boothby is greatly disturbed by these proceedings, which he characterises, sotto voce, as "jabber."

"Madame," he cries warningly, "whist, if you please—this is whist."

"I know," replies mademoiselle; "what you call be tranquil—hold your tongue. Très-bien!" and she pats him on the arm as if he had made a splendid joke. But still her tongue runs on, and Boothby loses his head in the constant turmoil, forgets his small cards, and trumps his partner's trick. In the end, Boothby and Co. lose five shillings on the rubber, and the former pays down his money with a stern promptitude, that shows how deeply he is moved.

"Ah, how I have been well amused," cries mademoiselle. But she will tempt fortune no more, and retires with her spoil to her embroidery-frame, while Mrs. Pyecroft takes the vacant place, but as her husband's partner. And then the game progresses in solemn silence. Claudia comes to look over my hand, but puts a question now and then between the deals, and Boothby looks over at us every now

and then, approvingly. For Boothby is winning, and in a good temper again. It is a pleasant family party, tranquil, and yet not dull; and through the open windows, the summer breeze rustles in, while the mill-stream murmurs and the noise of falling water sounds gently in the distance. From a distant ale-house come sounds of rustic revelry, the traditional chorus of the English peasant, which is almost pathetic in its monotonous burden, that suggests thatched roofs, and feeble twinklings from cottage-windows, and tired women fallen asleep with babies in their laps, and the rustle and hush of country lanes.

Our tranquillity is rather rudely interrupted. The outer door opens, there is an unsteady footstep in the passage, and an unpleasantly sallow and vacant face presents itself in the sitting-room. Mrs. Pyecroft starts up in alarm. It is Charlwood; is he ill? No, he is all right, he assures us, and sinks into a chair. To do him justice, he thinks himself perfectly sober, and articulates with slow distinctness in order to make the same abundantly evident. If only he would not talk, all would be well, for Mrs. Pyecroft makes strong efforts to hide his condition from her daughter. It is one of his bad bilious attacks coming on, she says, and will have him lie upon the sofa, with a pillow for his head. But Charlwood rejects these attempts with scorn. He persists in talking to Claudia in long, rigmarole sentences, to which there is neither beginning nor end, and Claudia regards him all the while in awe and pitying wonder.

At last Mr. Boothby rises to go; he can support the situation no longer. Boothby is quite at home anywhere in these parts, and mine host of The Bull will surely give him a corner to sleep in. But with Charlwood it is different; he is not in a fit condition to roam about by himself. There is nothing for it but to put him in my room. It is a great trial of friendship to have to look after a man in Charlwood's condition, but I manage to get him to bed, and soon he falls into deep and heavy sleep. What an excellent wife Rebecca will make for him! I cannot help thinking. On such occasions she would put him to bed and give him a hearty scolding next morning, without thinking too much about it. But for Claudia, in such a case, what trouble, degradation, horror, followed by permanent estrangement and lifelong misery!

It is one of those nights when it is no hardship to be without the shelter of a

roof. The air is dry, warm, and exhilarating; the river flows on without the vestige of a mist on its surface; and standing in the middle of the long wooden bridge, I seem to be sailing away between sky and river. What swirls of darkness under the trees, and bright, radiant streaks beyond! and the sky, although it is midnight, is still warm with daylight. There are light, fleecy clouds over the old church-tower, and the sky is bright behind it, but the shadows lie black and gloomy over the churchyard wall, and the pool below looks dark and fathomless, with an edge of ghostly white where the mill-stream rushes in.

Something seems to attract me to the hill which rises with such a noble sweep against the sky, to cross the bridge and rouse the sleepy toll-gatherer, and tramp through the sleeping village—the twin village of Streatley. There are tall, prim houses, and another church, not so solemn-looking as our Goring church, but lying back in its graveyard among the trees, and then a narrow lane takes me upon the open down.

Oh, who will o'er the downs so free?

Indeed, there is always a sense of freedom when you are on the chalk down, and the soft turf has a distinctly hospitable feeling, as it seems to assert itself as the feather-bed of primitive humanity. A wide, vague landscape stretches below, with the river showing here and there in silvery folds. The villages below seem to crouch in the darkness, but there are railway signal-lamps cheerfully shining, and a goods-train is fussing about, running off and returning with much banging and clanking of trucks. The beech-wood behind looks too solemn and ghost-like to venture into. It is not so many years since iron traps with cruel teeth were set in the woods, and spring-guns to blow the life out of trespassers. Will future ages believe it? And possibly a trap or two may have been left, forgotten in the bracken. But hark! a nightingale begins its liquid song from the copse below—a song full of strange sadness and delight. Presently in the far distance another bird, if a nightingale be a bird and not a wandering spirit—but anyhow another voice takes up the challenge, and the sweet concert thrills the soul with delight.

There is not long to wait for daybreak—the sky is already bright in the east, and reveals a steadfast solemn cloudscape, tier upon tier of grey quiet clouds, which presently show rifts and openings, charged

with golden light. Overhead a gauzy curtain of light clouds seems to be swept onwards towards the rising sun, catching a sudden rosy glow as it flies. The hills are still grey and dull, but the light steals among the roofs and gables of the sleeping villages, while the orange light is reflected in the river margin, and bridge and lock shine forth with glittering distinctness. Chanticleer wakes and crows full lustily, and a sudden vehement outburst of jubilant twittering rises from every tree and bush. Rooks fly hastily over the fences into the fields, horses awake and shake themselves, and cattle begin to low; and thus the day is fairly launched without mankind seeming to trouble itself much about it.

It gives one a sense of high superiority to the rest of the world to have seen the sun rise, and to have discovered a part of the day that nobody knows about—the hours of good daylight that people sleep through. But this is a feeling that soon exhausts itself, and is succeeded by the sad conviction that the sleeping world has the best of it, and an intolerable drowsiness that makes the hot sun-glow seem an overwhelming burden. But now that it is full daylight I can make out our boat, sleeping like the rest, in the cool backwater. And descending thereto, I enjoy the soundest sleep in the world, rocked by the soft pulsations of the river. And after that, and a delicious plunge into the cool, gleaming pool, the little village just awakening to life has a delicious aspect of Paradise, with its fresh gardens, and bright lawns, where a kind of Sunday feeling pervades everything.

At our inn the rosy-cheeked maid has yawningly unbarred the door, and looks sleepily out, but Claudia's blind is up, and through the open window I hear her singing at her toilette, in a fresh, sweet voice that has not the power of Rebecca's, but with a delicate timbre of its own. And Charwood, how is he faring now? I open the door, but there is nobody within. Charwood has disappeared, leaving only a pencilled note on the table:

"I could not face the home-party after last night. Adieu!"

MARDON HALL.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER III.

THE next day my picture was not touched. Mr. Dallas painted all the morning at his large picture of the banqueting-hall, and in the afternoon he told me he was going to drive with Lady Helen to the

Penton Rocks, about eight miles from us, and that he should be back close on supper-time. The carriage was to pick him up at the park gate.

The afternoon seemed very long, but when the evening came, and I was counting every minute till supper-time, a boy arrived with a message which Mr. Dallas had given him as he drove past the park gate to tell us not to wait for him, as he was going to dine with Colonel St. Quentin. The day following—oh, how well I remember these days and all that happened in them!—Mr. Dallas said:

"Now, Nancy, to-day I must make up for my holiday yesterday; if you will give me a sitting this afternoon, I will do my best to finish the sketch I am making of you, but if you are to be otherwise occupied, you know, I can find plenty to do."

"I should like you to go on with my picture," I said half timidly; "I sha'n't be busy this afternoon."

I felt that since these ladies had come to break in upon my dreamland, a barrier had risen between Mr. Dallas and me.

"You're sure you hadn't too much of it the other day?" he asked kindly.

"Oh no," I answered; "oh no; I want to stand for you." He thanked me with such a pleasant look, that I took courage to say: "You aren't going out again this evening, are you, Mr. Dallas?"

"I don't know, Nancy," he said; "that depends mostly on whether Lady Helen St. Quentin is kind enough to ask me."

"Oh," I said, and I could hear that I spoke in a tone of disappointment, "then you are nearly sure to go!"

"Why, Nancy," asked Mr. Dallas, "do you want me this evening—is it some particular occasion?"

"Oh no, sir," I answered; "it's no particular occasion; but I—I only wanted to know."

I was going to say, "I like you best to be here," but I checked myself.

"We shall see," he said; "I'll tell you later on; but, anyway, you'll be at the terrace steps at two o'clock, won't you?"

I said I would, and then I bethought myself to ask if the ladies were coming to Mardon that day.

"I believe so," he said, "and I hope so. Lady Doris takes a great interest in this picture I have begun, and I shall like to hear what she says of it as it goes on, for she has a very clear judgment, and perfect taste in matters of art. I always listen to her opinion of my work."

"It will make me very nervous if they are there, sir, especially if they make any remarks," I said boldly, for I felt irritated at the thought of not having him to myself, even for my picture. Of course, if they were there, I should count for nothing.

"Why should you be more nervous of Lady Doris than of me?" he said merrily. "She is far too kind-hearted and well-bred to make any remarks that could hurt you. You will see she will only comment upon my painting or on my idea."

I could not tell him just how I felt about it, and as I stood hesitating, he said:

"It is only because Lady Doris is a stranger to you that you feel like that. You must take my word for it that she is as beautiful as she looks; and that is giving her no small praise, is it?"

But Mr. Dallas's praise of Lady Doris did not reassure me at all. I hoped with all my heart that she would not be able to come; that a headache, or a thunder-storm, or anything else, would keep her away.

However, when I got into the garden, after helping Aunt Libby to wash the dinner-things, I found them already there, talking with Mr. Dallas.

Lady Helen had a book in her hand, and when Mr. Dallas began to paint, with Lady Doris near him, she sat down on a camp-stool, and said:

"As you are both absorbed in art, I will give my attention to literature. I shall be quite as intellectually employed as you, for I am going to read Hermann and Dorothea."

"In the original, or a translation?" asked Mr. Dallas.

"I don't affect translations," said Lady Helen, putting on a mock serious air. "To read a translation is to look at a landscape through blue spectacles."

"Well," said Mr. Dallas, "perhaps you won't mind reading the choice passages aloud, for Hermann and Dorothea is a very favourite story of mine."

"Do," said Lady Doris. "It is a great favourite of mine, too. And besides," she added with an arch laugh, "it will repress any tendency towards vain babbling. You remember what Colonel St. Quentin said last night about idle chatter."

They all laughed. I felt awkward and uncomfortable standing there, hearing all they said, but only half understanding, and not being able to join in it at all.

Mr. Dallas was quite right. Lady Doris would make no remark about me; she

scarcely seemed to notice that I was there. That was even more mortifying.

Presently Lady Helen began to read, in a language which I did not understand, something which, from the measured rise and fall of her voice, I judged to be poetry. Now and then she stopped, and they talked together about what she had been reading. From their remarks I gathered that it was a German story about a rich young man who fell in love at first sight with a poor girl. I made up my mind to ask Mr. Dallas to tell me the story some time.

"It is a beautiful description of Dorothea, isn't it?" said Lady Doris; "doesn't she seem to stand before you like a person whom you meet by chance on the road, and who compels your attention by her dignity and simplicity? You see every detail of her dress and every feature of her face, once and for always. Mr. Dallas, why don't you paint a Dorothea?"

"I've often thought of it," answered Mr. Dallas—"often."

"Well, then," said Lady Doris, "you must carry out your idea. I've often wished to see a really good picture of Hermann and Dorothea by the well, looking down at one another's reflections in the water."

"Yes," answered Mr. Dallas, his face lighting as he spoke with pleasure and sympathy; "yes; that is just the scene I have always wished to paint; but I would not try to do it unless you would consent to be my model for Dorothea; you are the only person I can imagine as Dorothea."

"Mr. Dallas—Mr. Dallas!" cried Lady Helen, "what did you say the other day about paying compliments? Didn't you say that an indirect compliment was the most to be condemned?"

But Lady Doris did not speak; she was standing close behind Mr. Dallas, with her colour slightly heightened, and her eyes bent down.

He turned, and looked at her, instead of answering Lady Helen, with an expression on his face that I had never seen before, so full of tenderness, of passion, and of admiration. Their eyes met, and their gaze seemed to me to last for ever. He murmured some words which I did not hear; but I saw her colour deepen. My heart, as I looked at them, seemed to jump into my throat; my eyes swam with burning tears, and Lady Helen's voice, as she began to read again, sounded muffled.

Lady Doris bent down and answered Mr. Dallas; the happiness in both their

faces was perfect. He laid his hand gently on hers as she spoke to him, and she did not draw it away. I could bear no more. I darted down the steps and across the garden, paying no heed to Mr. Dallas's voice, which called after me:

"What is it, Nancy—whatever is the matter?"

Some minutes after I was safely locked in my room, I heard him at the door, talking to Aunt Libby; their voices came up to me clearly through the open window:

"I'm so sorry," Mr. Dallas was saying; "I noticed she looked rather pale, but I was selfish enough to want to finish what I was doing. You'll tell her I'm very sorry, won't you?"

"Oh, it'll be nothing, sir," was Aunt Libby's reassuring answer; "she's a little out of sorts. We noticed it the other evening—her father and me. It's a trying time of year for young folks, and she's overgrown her strength, though she do look lusty. I'll make her some camomile-tea—that's what she wants."

Poor Aunt Libby! she had no notion of any ailment young people could have out of reach of the healing powers of camomile-tea, and when I told her that evening, after Mr. Dallas had gone to Bankwell with the ladies, that her remedy would do me no good, she was quite vexed at what she called my obstinacy.

"I assure you, Aunt Libby," I said, "that it would do me no good if I drank enough to drown myself."

"Of course it wouldn't," she answered testily, "if you drank enough to drown yourself; but if you took half a glass fasting, every morning, for nine days—you'd see!"

The days passed on after this slowly and heavily for me, but apparently for Mr. Dallas lightly enough. I did not see much of him, for when his friends were with him, of course I could not go to him, and he spent nearly all his time with them. My picture was finished as far as he intended to finish it before going back to his studio in London. He had said everything that was kind to me about my abrupt disappearance on that unhappy day, and asked me to forgive him for being so thoughtless as to keep me standing so long when I had been busy all the morning; but on the few occasions that he talked to me now I did not feel happy, and I had no longer any inclination to tell him all my little troubles. The presence of Lady Doris and my misery as I watched her

with Mr. Dallas had not only betrayed my own secret to me, but had opened my eyes to the great gulf that rank and education had placed between him and me. I had never fancied that his kindly interest in me had anything lover-like in it, but I had allowed my own thoughts to dwell unceasingly upon him, so that I had made a sort of appropriation of him in my mind, without thinking that the day must come when he would go out of my life—or, if I had thought of that, I had certainly fancied that as long as he was at Mardon, I should have him all to myself. Now that Lady Doris had come and broken the spell, I felt as if I could never forgive her for being so beautiful and so graceful, and for the influence she had with Mr. Dallas.

At last the time of his stay was coming to an end, for he had arranged to travel up to London with Colonel St. Quentin and his party, and he was hurrying to finish some sketches he was taking in the park before he should go.

One afternoon when the sun was blazing down from a sky such as we do not see half-a-dozen times in a summer, Aunt Libby asked me to walk to Bankwell for her. It was on some important business which could not be put off till the cool of the evening, because it was to do with her Post Office Savings Bank-book. Before I started Mr. Dallas said to me:

"As you are going to Bankwell, Nancy, will you be good enough to take a note to The Peacock for me; and, if you have time, will you wait for an answer? I cannot spare the time to go over there myself this afternoon, so you will be doing me a service."

The letter was addressed to Lady Doris Romaine. It was the first time I had ever seen her surname, and in the first feeling of curiosity and interest I forgot to feel angry. I murmured the name over to myself,—it sounded so beautiful, so like herself with her stately figure and gentle face. But as I walked slowly along the path through the park and the low-lying meadows beyond, which was the pleasantest way to Bankwell, I remembered myself, and I scarcely took note of my footsteps, so engrossed was I in my inexpressible misery.

When I had done my commission at the post-office, I went to The Peacock to deliver the note.

"I am to wait for an answer," I said, as I gave it to a servant.

Mrs. Jackson, the landlady, came bustling

past as I spoke. She read the address and said :

"The ladies are out, Nancy, but they may be in at any moment. If you are to wait, you shall go into the garden-room, for that's the coolest place, and you look very hot. It's their sitting-room, you know," she said, as she opened the door for me to go in. "Sit down and make yourself comfortable. I'm busy with the dinner."

I sat down on the old-fashioned sofa, and settled myself to wait. I looked all round the room, which the presence of these ladies had changed so much from its general appearance. I tried to fancy Mr. Dallas spending his evenings there, and passing in and out through the French-window to the garden which sloped to the river. I wished very much to examine the different things that lay about on the tables, but I did not dare to. At last my eyes fell upon the book that Lady Helen had read aloud the only time I had been with them in the garden. I could not resist my wish to take it up, and to see what that pretty love-story in the unknown tongue looked like. I had never asked Mr. Dallas to tell me about it, after all. I looked first to see whose name was written on the fly-leaf; it was Lady Doris's. As I held the book a heavy sheet of paper fell to the floor. I picked it up. It was a pen-and-ink drawing of two figures, a man and a woman, in a curious dress, such as I had never seen before. They were bending over a roadside well, which was fed by a trickling spring from the rock behind. The figures were so placed that the reflected faces could be seen in the broad basin of the fountain. They were both looking downwards, apparently at each other's image in the water. The woman's face was that of Lady Doris; the man's, Mr. Dallas's own. Underneath was written some words in a small, twisted handwriting, which I could not read, and then, "To my own Doris, in memory of May 30th. G. M. D." It was Mr. Dallas's writing. I held the sketch for a moment in my hand, while my brain reeled and my heart felt like a wild thing inside me. The 30th of May! That was the day I had rushed from the garden, while Mr. Dallas was speaking softly to Lady Doris. I took the paper by the top edge and tore it first through the middle, and then into a hundred fragments, which I scattered on the floor. Then, almost before I knew where I was, or what I had done, I found myself running along the meadows towards

Mardon. I could not collect my thoughts; I felt that I should be disgraced for ever in the eyes of Mr. Dallas, but it seemed to me as if nothing mattered any more. Since all my love and all my misery were my own burden and secret, since all my life came before me as spoilt, why should I care what anyone thought of me? I was a poor, lonely, ungainly girl, and I should never be anything else but a lonely, unhappy woman. I hoped I should die very soon, and I would send a message to Mr. Dallas when I was dying to ask him to come to me, and he would come, and I should tell him how my heart was broken, and he would pity me. And as I drew this picture, into my own mind came a great pity for myself, a great dread of the blankness and emptiness of the everyday life that lay before me. It was more a kind of instinct than anything else that led me straight to my garden when I got home. I was not looking for Mr. Dallas, but when I saw him there smoking under the apple-tree, I felt as if I had come to find him, and tell him what I had done to his sketch. It seemed as if I had only that very moment scattered the torn fragments on the brown carpet. He threw his cigar away when he saw me, and came towards me, saying :

"You haven't brought me an answer to my note, I know, for my friends came here just after you left. I'm sorry I gave you the trouble. I hope——" but there he stopped short. "Nancy," he said, "is anything amiss? Are you ill? The long walk in the heat has been too much for you; take your hat off and come and sit down."

He took my hand to lead me to the seat, but I drew it away, resisting him, as I said, in an agony of courage and despair :

"Mr. Dallas, I want to tell you something I've done that'll make you think very badly of me. You'll never care to be kind to me any more when I have told you."

"No, no," he said gently, but looking greatly surprised; "not so bad as that. But you're over excited; don't tell me anything now, wait until after supper—wait till to-morrow."

"No, I can't wait," I cried; "I can't; don't stop me. I must tell you. Oh, I cannot—I cannot!" I sobbed, and the tears poured down my cheeks, and dropped on my dress and hands, and on to the ground.

"Poor child, poor child!" he said soothingly, drawing me to him as he

gently wiped my tears; "don't try to tell me anything, and don't cry so; you'll be ill after it."

The touch of his hands and the sound of his voice helped me. I made a great effort to speak steadily, and with both my hands in his, I said:

"I opened one of Lady Doris's books while I was waiting in her room to-day, and I found a picture you had made of yourself and her, and I——" Then my voice once more gave way, and again I felt the tears dropping quickly down my burning cheeks. I dared not look at him, but to judge from his voice he was smiling as he said:

"That was inquisitive, but it was not unpardonable. Lady Doris will readily forgive you for that."

Again I made an extreme effort to speak.

"And I took the drawing," I faltered, "and tore it all up."

"Oh, Nancy!" he exclaimed, and his voice was very grave this time, "whatever made you do that? I shouldn't have thought you——"

But I stopped him, clinging to his hands, and crying:

"Don't, don't, Mr. Dallas—don't say what you think of me! I am so miserable. I wish I was dead!"

"Hush, hush, Nancy!" he said; "calm yourself, and come into the house. I am not angry with you."

But I could not calm myself, though I suffered him to lead me as far as the courtyard. My whole frame was shaking with hysterical sobs, over which I had no control.

"Nancy," he said, stopping and speaking very gently and tenderly, "I am so sorry this has happened, but as I can easily make Lady Doris another drawing, and explain the matter to her for you if you will let me, you need not make such a great trouble of it."

His kind, soft voice, and the gentleness of what he said, seemed to rouse my excitement still more. All my pent-up misery seemed to come to my lips at once, and I cried, while my voice sounded faint and far off in my own ears as the voice of some other person in distress whom I pitied but could not help:

"Ah, you do not know how great my trouble is; you do not know what is in my heart. You love her, and she is beautiful, and clever, and worthy of you in every way, and she loves you in return, and you are both happy; but I love you a thousand times more than she

does—she could not love you as I do; no one could!"

"Nancy, Nancy!" cried Mr. Dallas, vainly trying to draw me towards the gateway; "you don't know what you are saying—you are talking wildly."

"Oh yes, yes; I know what I am saying. How can Lady Doris love you as I do? She has everything beautiful about her. She has many friends. But you can't guess what you are to a poor girl like me, all alone here, with no one to care about me. No one will ever love you as I do—it is impossible!"

Then I felt the ground rising and sinking under my feet, the tower of the gateway bent forward and seemed to crush me; I had a sensation of floating through the air, and when I came to myself I was lying on my bed, with Aunt Libby bending over me; she was putting something into my mouth from a teaspoon, which choked me as it ran down my throat before I was sufficiently collected to swallow it.

"That's right, my dear," she said, as I opened my eyes. "You'll soon be better now; your long walk has been too much for you. I'm so sorry, and it was on my errand too. Lie still; you mustn't come down again to-night."

I didn't want to, and as I closed my eyes I seemed to float away again.

Late the next morning, when I woke from a heavy sleep into which I had fallen after hours of restless tossing, Aunt Libby was still beside my bed. I woke with a terrible sense of trouble upon me, and in a second I remembered all. I lay for some minutes without speaking. I felt as if I could not face life again after what had happened. At last I said:

"You haven't watched by me all night, have you, Aunt Libby?"

"No," she said, in a sort of whisper, as if she was speaking to some one who had been very ill; "I slept in the big chair, and I have been down this morning to see after things, as you were so sound asleep." She got up to draw back the curtains, saying: "It's a beautiful morning again."

"Oh, don't let in the light," I cried; "my head's so bad."

"Is it?" she said; "that's a bad job; but you can lie where you are if you aren't well, and if any one comes to see the Old House, I'll take them myself."

This was a wonderful concession from Aunt Libby. Lying in bed at Mardon Farm was only considered necessary in

extreme cases, and, as to her taking visitors through the house, that was unheard of.

"Thank you, Aunt Libby," I said; "but won't you have too much to do? How about Mr. Dallas?"

Even if the room had been filled with broad daylight, Aunt Libby would not have supposed that I asked about Mr. Dallas except with reference to dusting his rooms and seeing to his dinner.

"I was just going to tell you," she said. "Mr. Dallas is gone."

"Gone!" I exclaimed. "Gone! How and why?"

Could it be possible that he had told them all? But, no, I could not think of that. Aunt Libby's answer reassured me.

"Just after the postman had come this morning, he said he must go at once, back to London. He told me to tell you from him that he was very sorry not to be able to say good-bye to you himself, but I was to say it for him, and that he hoped you would soon be well again."

"Did he say nothing else?" I asked; "nothing about my—about his bringing me in last night?"

"No—nothing. Why, what should he have said? He couldn't have done less, and he's too kind to think twice about it. He has given me a most beautiful Norwich shawl, and your father a briar-wood pipe, and he's left a book for you with your name in it—he said for us all to remember him by; but I told him I didn't think we stood in need of anything to remember him by. We shall never forget Mr. Dallas, shall we, Nancy?"

"No," I said, with a feeling that the world was all empty around me now. "No, I shall never forget Mr. Dallas."

And I never have forgotten him, though I never saw him or heard from him again after he left Mardon. The intensity of my love for him and the bitter shame and remorse that followed that terrible evening, were the beginning and end of the one romance of my life.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

CHAPTER V.

"It is an odd thing, but I can't get it out of my mind that your father and the man I knew as Samuel Elliott were one and the same man. Why, it is the most speaking likeness I ever saw in my life. When I came into the room that first day, it struck me dumb. But Miss Dunscombe, in that high and mighty way of hers—no

offence to you, my good sir—she put it so completely on one side, that I did not venture a second remark upon it. But I never look at it, I assure you—I never look at it without a conviction that the man who sat for that portrait was the man I knew—and, what is more, if you will allow me to say so, you are that man's son. It is in your walk—it is in the turn of your head—why, it is in your very way of sitting listening to me now. I tell you I knew your father better than I know you—but it was not as Mr. Ellerton, of West Saxford, I knew him, but as Mr. Elliot, of Cecil Street."

A little, red-faced, elderly man, with a head of bristly grey hair, stood in the diminutive dining-room at Fair Oak, gesticulating with great animation opposite the portrait of Stephen Ellerton, the elder. He was Miss Dunscombe's tenant, and had occupied that position rather more than a fortnight, during which time he had seen as little as politeness would permit of her nephew. On this particular Saturday, however, he had insisted upon Steenie's dining with him, and now, his wife having left the table, he had set himself vigorously to work to imbue the young man with his own belief in his father's two-fold identity. The latter listened politely, but without being convinced.

"What did you know of this Mr. Elliott?" he asked. "To begin with, it must be more than twenty years since you set eyes on him—that is to say, if there be anything in your hypothesis!"

"I knew a good deal of him in one sense, and nothing at all in another," was the reply. "He came to us—to my brother and myself—in our business capacity, with money to invest. Where he came from and who he was was no concern of ours. He was satisfactory, inasmuch as he had the money and meant business; but he was unsatisfactory, inasmuch as he would ask your advice, and run straightway in the teeth of it. He would sell out when he ought to have held fast, and stick like grim death to a thing he ought never to have touched. If ever a man wasted his substance, he wasted his. At last one day he 'came a cropper' over some railway stock he had gone in for in his wholesale style. It sobered him. Well it might. It was a small fortune, and he gave orders to sell out all round—everything. It would not have been the wisest thing to do in most cases, but I honestly thought in his it might be, and I took his instructions. He

was to come again a day or two after for the money, and he did come; but he only got part of it. He was to come again the week after, but he never did come again. We made enquiries in Cecil Street, and found it was simply an address for letters, and that not one in six months was either received or applied for, from which I am inclined to think it was only in connection with his speculations that any secrecy was designed or employed; and we also made enquiries at the bank, where the cheque—a large one—had been cashed, we found, the same day. From that day to this we have neither seen nor heard anything of Mr. Samuel Elliott."

"It was odd enough," said Steenie, who had changed countenance as he listened. "And you think it was about the time?"

"Of your poor father's murder? Yes, Mr. Ellerton, I do. I could not be sure of the precise date of the transaction until I looked back, and it has cost me some little time and trouble to arrive at, but I have arrived at it. I said good-bye to Mr. Elliott for the last time, on the morning of the 20th of November, 1860."

"You mean that?" the young man cried, springing from his chair, and confronting his companion in great excitement. "You are quite sure of it? On the evening of that day, my father was found murdered."

"Did not I tell you so?" the other returned with a little irrepressible triumph. "Only your good aunt was so obstinate, she would not listen to me. Now, calm yourself. If, as I believe, we have made one discovery, is it not a possible thing we may make more? If we have—as I believe—cleared up the mystery of Elliott's disappearance, may we not find a clue to that of Ellerton's murder?"

"It looks amazingly like it," Steenie allowed—adding, the next moment, his lifelong legal training in caution and reserve asserting itself; "and yet, it might be nothing but a coincidence."

"Nothing but a coincidence!" the stockbroker echoed scornfully. "Is your father, staring me in the face there, the image of the man I knew, or is he not? Did your father get rid of his money in some way unknown to his friends, or did he not? Was anybody able to prove where he was, or what he was about, the greater part of the last day of his life, or not? I tell you I have been over the whole ground. When once a thing takes hold of me I don't find it so easy to shake it off; and I've heard all there is to say, and

read all there is to read about the whole business, and I have put two and two together, till, it seems to me, the whole thing fits into a nutshell."

"And supposing you are right?" said Steenie. "Supposing my poor father did, for some purpose of his own, carry on certain transactions under a feigned name—which does not appear, from all I have ever heard of him, very likely—supposing all that, what good is the discovery to anybody now?"

"It proves that he was better worth the robbing than anybody supposed," the other replied with some contempt. "Call yourself a lawyer! I'd have made a better lawyer than you, my lad! Do you call it nothing in a case of this kind to find a motive?"

"It was always understood there was a motive. The mere finding of the pocket-book—"

"Oh, bother the pocket-book! For all anybody could tell, the emptying of it might have been nothing but a blind. The idea was that your father had very little about him. It was not his habit to carry money about him."

"Then you think," Steenie began slowly, and as if trying to impress a new idea upon his own mind; "you think that the murder must have been committed by somebody who was somehow in the secret? At that rate, the thing would be to discover who was, or was likely to have been. I am afraid after all these years, and considering how well it has been kept—so well, that even now it has yet to be proved that ever there was one—there is but a poor chance of anything of the kind. I am afraid you will think me apathetic," he added, flushing, "but I don't see my way, or what good is to be done by re-opening the whole miserable question."

The older man looked him up and down at these words, with a curious expression.

"Well," he said at length, "I don't understand you or any of your generation—blest if I do! You care about nothing, and concern yourselves about nothing, and I'm sorry for you. I would not exchange temperaments with you if, to do it, I could exchange my grey hairs for your youth. Why, if any villain had robbed me of my father, I should never have rested until I had unearthed him!"

"Even if he had had twenty years' start of you?" Ellerton observed dryly. "You forget that!"

"I'd have dragged him out of his

grave!" was the reply; but there was no working Steenie up to the pitch required of him, and the stockbroker abandoned the attempt in disgust. He was an active-minded, impulsive little man, whose time, since he had retired into private life, hung somewhat heavy on his hands, and who would have liked nothing better than to apply himself to the unravelling of the mystery, to which he thought he had found a clue; but if the son of the murdered man declined to enter into it, why should he? It was no duty incumbent upon him to hunt any man down to the death!

One thing was certain: Steenie had as much upon his hands, as the year advanced, as he had time or experience for.

Mr. Bevan became suddenly much worse, and quite unable even to consult with or direct his junior partner. Fortunately for the latter, there was in the office one older head than his own, and the head-clerk was a wise man, and had been content to bide his time, and keep friends with the young man who had been put above him. So the business got on fairly well without the principal; but at home there was terrible trouble, and strange reports began to get wind in the town.

"What is it they are saying about Mr. Bevan?" his aunt wrote to Steenie. "I had the most unsatisfactory letter, brimful of hints and innuendoes, from Fanny Stracey this morning, and I want to know the truth."

"Nobody knows it," the young man wrote back laconically, "that is to say, nobody out of the house. I saw Nellie yesterday. She says her father is very weak, and has bad nights. Mrs. Joliffe is worn out nursing him, but will not hear of having anybody in, or of allowing Nellie to sit up. The worry is doing her harm as it is; she does not look like the same girl. It is to be hoped for all their sakes the poor governor will get better or worse, before long. There are things I ought to see him about, but I cannot get at him, though Margetts told me himself the other day, he had given no orders to the contrary."

"I don't think anything of that," Miss Dunscombe remarked upon this last passage; "Margetts is as poor a creature as ever deluded people into thinking that he knew how to doctor them."

Nevertheless, in this case, Margetts was right, and his patient could have received Steenie perfectly well, had he chosen. In the last days of June there came to the

latter the summons for which he was waiting.

"Papa has come home," wrote Mary Hamilton, "and you must come up and see him—that is, if you still think it is worth while. I have got him to agree to this, but it is only fair to tell you it has not been easy even to do so much, and I am afraid there is nothing to look forward to but disappointment. You must please yourself, therefore, about coming, but I should like you to see papa, if it be only this once."

There was a hopeless, resigned sound about this, which impressed him more coming from the girl who had shown herself so bright, and resolute, and full of confidence, than it would have done had he seen less of these characteristics in her, and he went up to town in anything but an enviable state of mind. Nor did his reception at The Cedars tend to raise his spirits. He was shown into the pretty drawing-room in which Mary had presented him to Mrs. Lindsay, and here he found father and daughter awaiting him together. About most meetings, after a long separation, there is perhaps a certain sense of shortcoming. There was a depth of tenderness in the farewell, which had its origin in the sense of loss, and which must ever be wanting to that of recovery. And in this case outward circumstances strengthened the contrast. There had been no third person present at their parting, and now there was one who was to Steenie personally a perfect stranger. This in itself would have dismayed him somewhat, even had Mary been more like herself; but he had never seen her as she was to-day—pale, and nervous, and subdued—clinging, as it appeared to him, in a quite unusual and incomprehensible way, to her father. It was not the attitude he should have supposed natural to her, nor was it—so far he was right; but long before the interview came to an end he understood it, and knew how in her mind she stood, as it were, defending her father against his aunt—if need should be, against him!

He had not been sent for by these two either to be accepted in defiance of Miss Dunscombe's wishes, or to be sent about his business upon any pretence whatever.

"I have never yet been ashamed to give my reason for anything I have done," the Colonel had said quietly; "and I am not going to begin now."

Acting upon this, he had already told Mary of that painful passage in his life, in which Margaret Dunscombe had played so

prominent a part, and he now repeated the narrative to her nephew.

"I was very much in love with her," he said, "and to the best of my belief she loved me, and meant to marry me. But your father and mother were dead against it. Your mother could not bear the idea of parting with her, and your father had been prejudiced against me, and told me plainly I was not good enough for her, and that if she took me it would be in opposition to both their wishes. The last time I ever saw him we came to high words on the subject, and when I met Margaret almost immediately afterwards, she aggravated my exasperation by her coolness, and I talked a good deal of nonsense, which unhappily made more impression upon her than it appeared to do at the time. Directly I heard what had happened at Hazeldean, I went to see her and find out in what way I could be of use to them," he added, and then he detailed to Steenie the reception he had met with. "How the glove came to be where it was found is a mystery to me to this day," he observed finally. "That my glove it was I have no manner of doubt, but how it got there I have never been able to imagine. I might have dropped it myself the day before had I taken that path through the shrubberies, but I never went that way, so the only natural hypothesis I could think of fell through at once."

Mary sat listening, her eyes fixed intently on Steenie's face. He must know, she thought, that her father could never have told the story had there been a spark of truth in the charge brought against him. Besides, who could look at him—at his noble, beautiful face, and grand, soldierly bearing, and doubt him?

She spoke now, for the first time.

"Is it quite out of the question," she suggested, "that you might have dropped it somewhere else—somewhere where Mr. Ellerton may have picked it up by mistake for his own?"

"I thought of that, too, at the time," the Colonel replied. "But the one theory would not hold water any better than the other. I remember the mending of the glove well enough, and could have sworn to the day and the hour, and Stephen Ellerton and I never met again afterwards. There was but one clear day between it and the night of the murder, and that day

I happened to spend miles away from West Saxford. On the day of the murder itself, it was proved," he added, looking at Steenie, "that your father left for London in the morning, and returned, as he had gone, by rail, in the afternoon, and he was never seen alive afterwards, excepting at the club and on his way there—and I had not been within the club doors for a week or more. No! I have tried to puzzle it out, often and often, but I have never got any farther."

The conversation did not stop there, though the conjectures did. Colonel Hamilton was very explicit with Steenie. It was a hard thing, he acknowledged, that the happiness of any two people should be sacrificed to a delusion such as Miss Dunscombe's, but there was no help for it. Steenie must see for himself that, so long as it existed, it raised an insuperable barrier between Mary and himself. The only hope that was left to them was the forlorn hope that the mystery of Stephen Ellerton's death might yet be elucidated.

"And how much likelihood there is of that," he added a little grimly, "you are better able to judge than I."

The young man's heart leapt up within him, as he suddenly bethought himself of his conversation with the stockbroker. He remembered remorsefully that he had thrown cold water enough upon the fire of his zeal the other day to quench it for ever; but he doubted not he could rekindle it. The Colonel and Mary Hamilton listened with interest and intelligence.

"If I were in your place," the former observed, when Steenie concluded, "I should see more of this Mr. Burroughes, and I should give him to understand that I had mistaken my own feelings upon the subject, and should be thankful for his co-operation. I am not sure, were it my own case, I should not go farther, and with the new light that has been thrown upon your father's habits and transactions, see what they could do for you in Scotland Yard."

"You think it so important?"

"I do," Colonel Hamilton returned quietly. "It seems to me as if, having got so far, one ought to be able to go farther; but I have no wish to impose my opinion upon you. The only thing is—if your heart is really set upon winning this girl," and as he spoke, he drew Mary to his side, "you know the conditions."

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IMMEDIATE PROVISION for
OLD AGE or EARLY DEATH

SPECIAL
ATTENTION
REQUESTED TO THE
ANNEXED TABLES
OF THE

ROYAL

INSURANCE
COMPANY

LIVERPOOL
&
LONDON

FUNDS IN HAND
EXCEED
£5,000,000, STERLING

Printed by R. & R. CLARK, Edinburgh.

ROYAL INSURANCE COMPANY

IMMEDIATE PROVISION FOR OLD AGE OR EARLY DEATH.

THE SUM ASSURED PAYABLE AT AN AGE SPECIFIED, OR AT DEATH IF EARLIER.

PREMIUMS FOR EACH £100.

WITHOUT PARTICIPATION IN PROFITS.

Age.	At Age 70 or Death.		At Age 60 or Death.		At Age 50 or Death.	
	Half-Yearly Premium.	Yearly Premium.	Half-Yearly Premium.	Yearly Premium.	Half-Yearly Premium.	Yearly Premium.
20	£ s. d. 0 19 5	£ s. d. 1 18 2	£ s. d. 1 2 7	£ s. d. 2 4 4	£ s. d. 1 9 6	£ s. d. 2 17 9
21	1 0 0	1 19 3	1 3 4	2 5 9	1 10 9	3 0 2
22	1 0 7	2 0 4	1 4 1	2 7 3	1 12 1	3 2 10
23	1 1 1	2 1 5	1 4 11	2 8 10	1 13 6	3 5 7
24	1 1 9	2 2 7	1 5 9	2 10 7	1 15 0	3 8 7
25	1 2 4	2 3 10	1 6 8	2 12 4	1 16 9	3 11 10
26	1 3 0	2 5 2	1 7 8	2 14 3	1 18 6	3 15 4
27	1 3 8	2 6 6	1 8 8	2 16 2	2 0 5	3 19 1
28	1 4 5	2 7 10	1 9 9	2 18 3	2 2 7	4 3 3
29	1 5 1	2 9 3	1 10 9	3 0 4	2 4 10	4 7 8
30	1 5 10	2 10 8	1 12 0	3 2 8	2 7 5	4 12 7
31	1 6 8	2 12 3	1 13 3	3 5 1	2 10 3	4 18 0
32	1 7 6	2 13 10	1 14 7	3 7 8	2 13 4	5 4 0
33	1 8 4	2 15 6	1 16 0	3 10 5	2 16 10	5 10 8
34	1 9 3	2 17 3	1 17 6	3 13 5	3 0 8	5 18 1
35	1 10 2	2 19 1	1 19 2	3 16 8	3 5 2	6 6 8
36	1 11 2	3 1 1	2 1 0	4 0 2	3 10 2	6 16 4
37	1 12 3	3 3 2	2 3 0	4 4 0	3 16 1	7 7 7
38	1 13 4	3 5 4	2 5 1	4 8 0	4 3 0	8 0 8
39	1 14 7	3 7 8	2 7 5	4 12 7	4 11 1	8 16 1
40	1 15 10	3 10 2	2 9 11	4 17 5	5 0 11	9 14 8
41	1 17 3	3 12 11	2 12 10	5 3 1	...	...
42	1 18 9	3 15 10	2 16 1	5 9 3	...	...
43	2 0 5	3 19 0	2 19 8	5 16 2	...	...
44	2 2 2	4 2 5	3 3 9	6 4 0	...	...
45	2 4 1	4 6 1	3 8 4	6 12 9	...	...
46	2 6 2	4 10 1	...	...	...	...
47	2 8 5	4 14 5	...	...	...	...
48	2 10 10	4 19 2	...	...	...	...
49	2 13 6	5 4 4	...	...	...	...
50	2 16 5	5 9 11	...	...	...	...

The amounts to be saved are at the discretion of every one; the times for payment are fixed; the difficulty of investing small sums, and the danger of keeping them *uninvested*, are both removed; and the additional advantage is offered that, in case of death, the FULL SUM intended for *Old Age* is available at once as a PROVISION FOR FAMILY or otherwise, *even if only One Payment of Premium has been made.*

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Age	5 Annual Payments.			10 Annual Payments.			15 Annual Payments.			20 Annual Payments.			Age	5 Annual Payments.			10 Annual Payments.			15 Annual Payments.			20 Annual Payments.		
	Prem.			Prem.			Prem.			Prem.				Prem.			Prem.			Prem.			Prem.		
15	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	38	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
16	6	15	2	3	15	6	2	16	5	2	6	5	39	10	6	10	5	17	0	4	8	0	3	13	9
17	6	18	0	3	17	2	2	17	6	2	7	5	40	10	10	7	5	19	2	4	9	9	3	15	3
18	7	0	10	3	18	10	2	18	8	2	8	6	41	10	14	6	6	1	5	4	11	6	3	16	10
19	7	3	8	4	0	6	3	0	0	2	9	6	42	10	18	5	6	3	9	4	13	3	3	18	6
20	7	6	7	4	2	3	3	1	3	2	10	6	43	11	2	5	6	6	2	4	15	2	4	0	3
21	7	9	6	4	3	11	3	2	6	2	11	8	44	11	6	8	6	8	9	4	17	4	4	2	2
22	7	12	4	4	5	6	3	3	9	2	12	9	45	11	11	2	6	11	6	4	19	6	4	4	2
23	7	15	0	4	7	2	3	5	0	2	13	10	46	11	15	10	6	14	4	5	1	9	4	6	4
24	7	17	10	4	8	9	3	6	4	2	14	11	47	12	0	7	6	17	4	5	4	2	4	8	7
25	8	0	10	4	10	6	3	7	8	2	16	0	48	12	5	6	7	0	5	5	6	8	4	10	10
26	8	3	10	4	12	3	3	9	0	2	17	2	49	12	10	5	7	3	6	5	9	3	4	13	3
27	8	7	0	4	14	0	3	10	4	2	18	4	50	12	15	4	7	6	8	5	12	0	4	15	10
28	8	10	3	4	15	10	3	11	8	2	19	6	51	13	0	3	7	9	10	5	14	11	4	18	7
29	8	13	7	4	17	8	3	13	0	3	0	8	52	13	5	5	7	13	2	5	18	0	5	1	5
30	8	16	10	4	19	7	3	14	6	3	1	10	53	13	10	8	7	16	9	6	1	2	5	4	4
31	9	0	0	5	1	6	3	15	11	3	3	0	54	13	16	0	8	0	5	6	4	5	5	7	5
32	9	3	3	5	3	5	3	17	4	3	4	3	55	14	1	5	8	4	0	6	7	10	5	10	8
33	9	6	6	5	5	4	3	18	9	3	5	6	56	14	7	0	8	7	8	6	11	5	5	14	2
34	9	9	9	5	7	2	4	0	2	3	6	9	57	14	12	9	8	11	8	6	15	2	5	18	0
35	9	13	0	5	9	0	4	1	8	3	8	0	58	14	18	10	8	16	0	6	19	2	6	2	0
36	9	16	4	5	11	0	4	3	2	3	9	5	59	15	5	3	9	0	8	7	3	5	6	6	3
37	9	19	9	5	13	0	4	4	8	3	10	10	60	15	12	0	9	5	10	7	7	10	6	10	9
38	10	3	3	5	15	0	4	6	3	3	12	3		15	19	0	9	11	6	7	12	5	6	15	6

EXAMPLE.

A person aged 25 next birthday may, by paying an Annual Premium of £4:12:3 for ten years, or of £2:17:2 for 20 years, secure £100 to his Heirs at his decease.

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THE

ROYAL

INSURANCE COMPANY

AFFORD FULL INFORMATION

PAYMENTS CEASE

DURING
OLD AGE

FUNDS IN HAND
EXCEED
£5,000,000, STERLING

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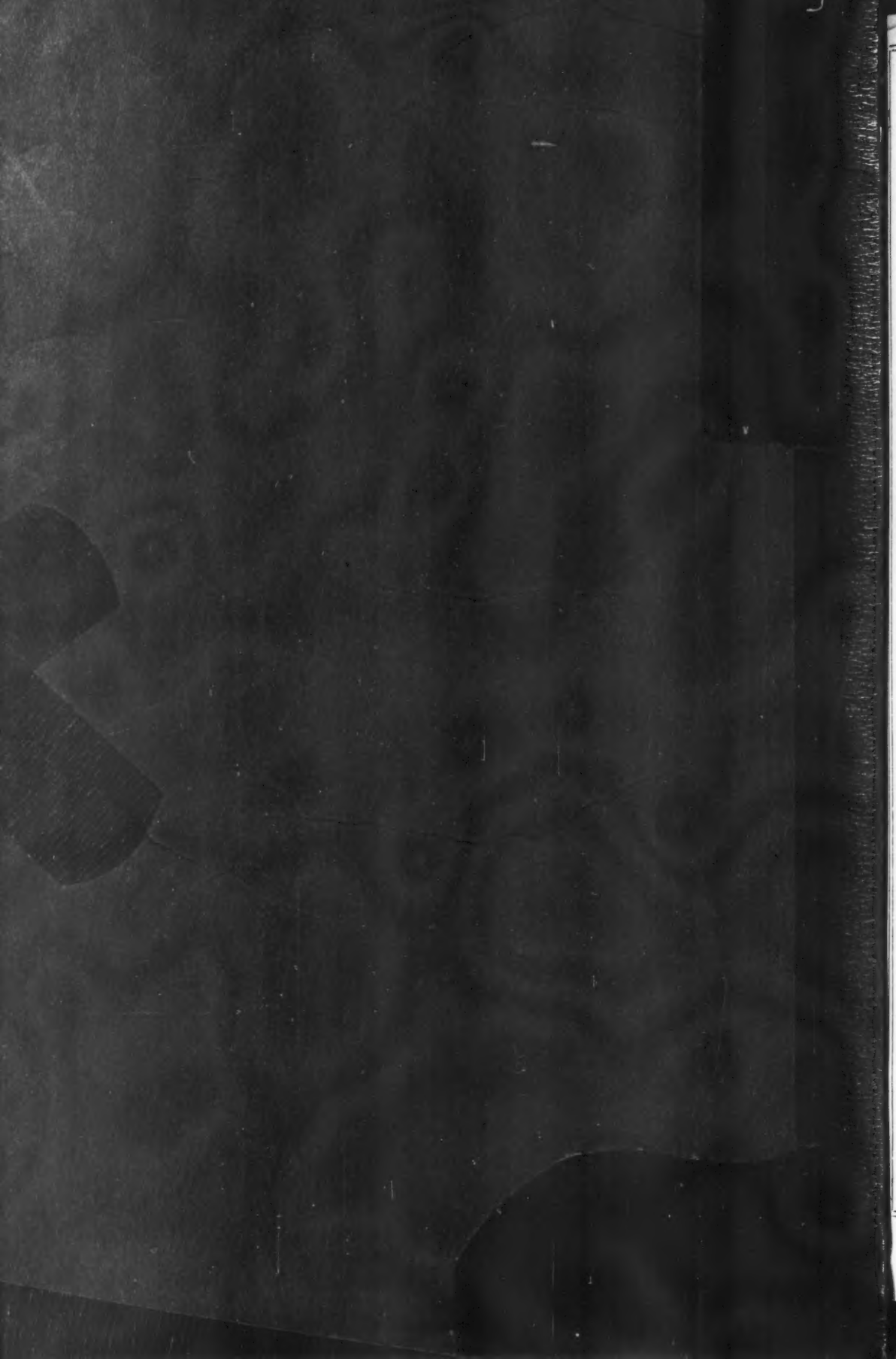
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Extract from the District Railway Guide to International Health Exhibition, South Kensington, 1884.

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